





LIBRARY
OF THE
UNIVERSITY
OF ILLINOIS

A.

S E R M O N

PREACHED IN

ST. MICHAEL'S CHURCH, ALNWICK,

ON SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 28TH, 1862,

In aid of the Cotton Distress Relief Fund.

BY

HENRY M. OSWALD, M.A.,

CURATE OF ALNWICK.

Published by Request.

ALNWICK:

PRINTED BY M. SMITH, 39, BONDGATE STREET.

1862.

PREFACE.

UPON the delivery of the following Sermon the Churchwardens of the Parish solicited its Publication. The Author had some hesitation in complying with the request so kindly made, as he felt that he had merely given utterance to sentiments now very generally entertained, and which doubtless are being better expressed from many Pulpits. But the peculiar position of a Writer may give a force to words which, in themselves, they would not possess. And if the Publication of this Discourse should afford satisfaction or profit to any of the Parishioners of Alnwick, amongst whom he has ministered for the last three years, and at whose hands he has received much kindness, he will not regret that he has overcome his natural reluctance to appear in print.

S E R M O N .

LUKE X. 33.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was : and when he saw him, he had compassion on him.

IT is unnecessary for me on this occasion to enter into the Parable of the Good Samaritan of which these words form a part. The whole story is doubtless familiar to almost all who are here present. And yet it may be as well to glance briefly at the circumstances under which it was delivered. We read in the 25th verse, that a certain lawyer stood up, and tempted our Lord, saying, "Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" that Christ said unto him, "What is written in the law? how readest thou? and that he answering, said, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself." To which our Blessed Lord vouchsafed the reply, "Thou hast answered right, this do, and thou shalt live." For, as he said in another place, "on these two commandments hang all the law and the Prophets." In

perfect and entire love to God as the one great sovereign Ruler of the Universe, infinite alike in power and in goodness, and in that affection to our neighbour as His handy-work and offspring, which causes us to love others even as ourselves, there is undoubtedly comprised the fulfilling of the whole law, the keeping of the whole commandments, a full, perfect, and entire obedience. And in such obedience is involved eternal life. And hence the answer of our Lord, "This do and thou shalt live."

Doubtless, he who questioned Him had yet to learn that such is the frailty of man's condition that it is utterly beyond his power to walk in the straight path of God's commandments, that he is in fact as one who lies "wounded" and "half dead" by the road side; that he has need of a Saviour to raise him from his lost condition; that he must rest upon a righteousness not his own if he is to appear before an all holy God, and enter into eternal life. All this the lawyer had yet to learn, and yet so far he had answered right; he had given a true summary of the duty of man to God, and eternal life is promised in its fulfilment.

But we go on to read that "he willing to justify himself," asked as a further question, "Who is my neighbour?" He was desirous to be informed as to who it was that he was bound to look upon with that love required of him in the second great commandment of the

law. To this question our Lord does not return a direct answer, but leaves His meaning to be gathered from the scope of the well known Parable which follows.

He frames an answer not to satisfy the lawyer's curiosity, but to instruct him in his duty. He does not directly tell him who is his neighbour. But by a Parable He leads him to acknowledge that every one, though a Samaritan, that is to say a foreigner and an enemy, is neighbour to a Jew whom he assists in distress, and that no one, closely allied though he may be to him, is neighbour to one whom he refuses to succour in the time of need. He shews him that it is his duty to endeavour, whenever he is able, to perform a neighbour's part, and to find a neighbour in the case of every one who needs his help. This conclusion the lawyer himself is forced to gather; he is forced to see that as the despised Samaritan was ready to assist the Jew, so he was plainly entitled to receive like succour in return. Our Lord's words to him are plain, "Which now of these three thinkest thou was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves. And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise." And assuredly to us now, no less than to him then, is the conduct of the Good Samaritan set up as a model for imitation.

And yet, as we look into the matter, we

cannot fail to see that had the Samaritan refrained from active sympathy he might (as men commonly argue) have had much to say in justification of his conduct. It is, of course, well known that the Jews had "no dealings" with the Samaritans, that a most bitter enmity existed betwixt those two communities. The variance of political factions when party spirit is most prevalent, the animosity of religious sects when fanaticism is at its height, would probably but inadequately set forth the intense rancour that prevailed, derived originally from a galling national insult, and apparently but intensified through the lapse of revolving years. Hence, the Samaritan, who knew himself to be the object of hatred and contempt, might plausibly have argued that it was not his office to interfere in the case of the afflicted Jew. He might have expressed pity for him in his distressed condition. He might have been most indignant with the Priest and Levite who had so neglected their wounded countrymen. He might even have been ready to overwhelm them with reproaches for their conduct. But we know what a different course in reality he pursued. Without pausing to ask whose duty it was to relieve distress, he was contented to see that distress existed, and spared himself no labour, no inconvenience, no expense, in order that a remedy might be supplied. Well, indeed, would it be for us could we learn to follow his

example, and, amidst the misery and destitution which exists around us, to shew forth that loving compassion which he evinced. And upon the present occasion as is probably known to almost all here present I have a special motive in bringing this topic under your notice. I have now to call upon you to render what aid is in your power to those who are at this time suffering so acutely from the suspension of the Cotton manufactures in certain parts of our country. And few, indeed, if any, can be ignorant, so universally now is news disseminated, either of the existence of this deep distress, or of the causes which have led to it.

Hence, it is not necessary that I should speak of that fearful war now raging across the seas betwixt two sections of a once united people, connected with us by the tie of hereditary descent, of a common language, and the closest intercourse, a war to which history scarcely supplies a parallel, when we look to the magnitude of the forces engaged, to the destruction of life and property which has taken place, or, I fear it must be added, to the evil passions which have been aroused, and the atrocities which have been committed by brethren against brethren. Nor are the effects of this miserable civil war confined to the land in which it rages. It casts its deadly shadow over us; it involves our country also in a portion of its evils. We ought, indeed, rather

than repine at this to be most thankful that whatever calamities may press upon our country, our condition is at least much happier than theirs. For what scourge ever inflicted upon a nation has been more utterly appalling than the civil warfare which we witness there?

It is difficult to exaggerate the evils which war, wherever it appears, brings with it in its train. We ourselves make every exertion to avert such a sad disaster. There are those* present here this day who have expended their labour, time, and money in order that they may be ready, should need require, to oppose with their very life blood any invasion of our soil. And such form but a fraction of the tens of thousands who throughout the length and breadth of our land have come forward with the same high object. Yet even if the event against which we so zealously guard unhappily did take place, even if (which God avert) we had to combat a foreign army upon our land, even then our condition would not be so unhappy as that of a people torn asunder in fratricidal combat, devastating the fields, and shedding the blood of their own kinsmen. And upon this matter, while we avoid vain boasting, there are yet, as I think, especially two points in which as British subjects we have great cause for thankfulness; firstly, the conduct of our

* In allusion to the Percy Artillery Volunteers who had assembled for Church Parade on this occasion.

rulers in refusing to deviate from an honourable neutrality betwixt the contending parties, and secondly, the wonderful patience of our suffering people in submitting without a murmur to their lot. On the one hand, men have not hesitated to face whatever consequences might ensue from an undeviating adherence to the line which justice pointed out, even when material interest might seem to dictate a different course; and on the other hand, men have been found to acquiesce without complaint in such a policy; to accept with resignation the stern necessities of the case, and without vain murmurs or repinings to submit themselves to the evils which they look on as inevitable.

But if the conduct of our distressed operatives throughout this crisis has been so praiseworthy it surely becomes all classes of the community not to suffer them to bear such a heavy burden alone, but to come forward and render that substantial aid by which their present sufferings may be at the least alleviated.

For, indeed, the state of affairs amounts to a national crisis, and calls forth the united endeavours of the nation. This is not a case in which any can venture to say that local efforts would prove sufficient, that Lancashire has no claims on him, that it is for those who have made the profit to bear the loss, and the like. While tens of thousands are crying aloud for bread, who will venture to utter in reply, "Am

I my brother's keeper?" Each one amongst us has a personal responsibility of which no possible short comings of his neighbours can divest him. If there be any who have amassed great wealth through that source of industry now so paralysed, they are most solemnly bound to give largely of their means to alleviate the existing destitution. But not the less is it the duty of all of us to contribute, I do not say in the same proportion, but real substantial assistance for our suffering countrymen. Depend upon it the case requires the strenuous exertions of the entire community. Whether we look to the numbers now out of employment, or to the probable continuance of this distress, we see what a very wide field there is for our sympathy and support. We may look forward to a cessation of this present unhappy war, and to at least a partial restoration of our former trade. Or we may look to other sources for a supply of the much needed cotton. But in either case time must elapse before matters can return to their old condition. And in the meanwhile what prolonged sufferings must be undergone. There are those, doubtless, now present here upon whom Providence has bestowed but scanty means, and who, as they earn from week to week little more than suffices for food and raiment, can realize far better than their richer brethren what is the miserable anxiety of finding that the scanty

earnings cease, that with the utmost wish to labour no work is to be had. They can picture to themselves the struggle so long, so hopelessly maintained; the savings from more prosperous times gradually expended; the articles of furniture and other small possessions reluctantly one by one put up for sale; all efforts made to avert that utter destitution which yet advances onwards with rapid strides. Those who themselves are poor can well realize this state of extreme want, they, therefore, are certainly bound no less than ourselves to do their part towards its relief. Nothing is more false than to suppose that poverty exempts a man from the duty, or rather from the high privilege of almsgiving. For, indeed, an high privilege it is, when bestowed in a right spirit it blesses him who gives no less than him who takes. Those who out of their poverty freely aid the destitute will find God's blessing rest upon them. Just as the widow woman of Sarepta, who hesitated not to give to the Prophet her very last morsel, found that "the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail," so will it ever be with such as live a life of faith, as "use their diligence freely to give of their little;" the worldly wise may ridicule their folly, but to them belongs the true, the heavenly wisdom which "lays up a good foundation against the time to come."

But, it may be said that, bitter as is the

distress which now exists, there is yet in our country a fixed provision by which none can absolutely perish by hunger, but all are enabled to lay claim to food and shelter. And we may rejoice that such is the case. Yet who, on this account, will venture to turn a deaf ear to the cry of our suffering operatives, or in answer to their cry for aid to point out to them the Union Workhouse? Who would not desire, so far as lies in his power, to preserve an industrious population from this last resort? Not, indeed, that there can be disgrace which does not arise from a man's own misconduct. Still, when we consider the odium which not unnaturally is attached to the name of pauper, the irksome, however necessary, confinement to which he is subjected, the wretched society into which he is cast, above all his forced separation from wife and children, can we altogether be surprised that men of independent spirit will often face the bitterest privations, nay death itself, rather than enrol themselves among those ranks, that they will seek the fields and the road sides rather than food and shelter under such conditions. Nor, while we seek to provide that aid for our suffering operatives which may enable them to maintain the struggle in their own homes, should we forget that there is a large class immediately above them whose means also are most straitened, and upon whom the Poor Rates, so high already, would become

absolutely intolerable, did not private benevolence largely supplement that enforced provision which the law requires. In whatever aspect we regard this present crisis, we see a call for our strenuous exertions. At this moment all parts of the country have a most solemn duty to perform in behalf of those suffering districts. And let me beg of you, my Christian Brethren, to come forward on this occasion with a real, and not a mere nominal, offering in aid of so righteous a cause.

Surely, if ever, the Parable of the Good Samaritan applies in the present case. Surely, the wayfarer, despoiled and wounded by the way-side, represents the case of many a suffering fellow-countryman. And is it in vain that Christ says to each one amongst you, "Go thou and do likewise," be neighbour to those who through no special fault of their own have fallen into such calamities? Need I remind you how inseparable are those two great commandments—perfect and entire love to God, and that love to our neighbour as ourself? "If a man say he love God and hateth his brother, he is a liar, for if he love not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen." Or is it necessary to show that such love must be not a mere lifeless sentiment, but a motive of benevolent action? For "whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and

shutteth up his compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him." And "pure religion, and undefiled before God and the Father, is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world."

It cannot be said that the appeals which from time to time are made from this place are responded to as they ought to be. Individuals, no doubt, may give according to their means, but the congregation as a body, I say it with regret, does not do so. Still, I am not without some hopes that this case which appeals so strongly to your sympathies as men, as Englishmen, above all as Christians, may meet with something like an adequate response, and may prove, I will not say an exception to your accustomed standard of almsgiving, but the inauguration of a better state of things. It is easy, doubtless, to disregard the call now made to you; it is easy to drop into a box a contribution which you would be ashamed to write down on paper. You may return home, to your "farms" and to your "merchandise," and imagine, perhaps, that no power in heaven or earth can affect your means, or cripple the industry by which you prosper. Meanwhile, autumn rapidly glides away; the days are shortening; the cold will gradually become intense. And if, in the Journals daily set before you, you read henceforth of sufferings tenfold increased in the

severities of our winter climate, (and should not this probability now be faced) will it be a pleasing reflection to you that you have been of the number of those who, by withholding their just proportion, have prevented the total sum collected from proving adequate to the necessities of the case? Let me hope better things from all here present. Let me hope that, as you receive so many blessings at the hands of a loving Heavenly Father, you will freely render to Him, of the means entrusted to you when he calls you to aid your brethren upon earth. Hereafter "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him," there shall then be found "on his right hand" those who shall say unto Him, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee? or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? when saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in? or naked, and clothed Thee? or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee? And the King shall answer, and say unto them, Verily, I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto Me." May we be found in that blessed company. May it be our lot to listen to the words addressed to them, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."



